

BERLIN'S SORDID NIGHT LIFE IS STAGED IN GLOOM

By RAYMOND SWING.

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"NIGHT LIFE" in a large city might be casually defined as either brilliant or dull. The Paris of before the war knew how to have a cheerful time while amusing itself. Berlin never did. And the German capital retains to-day its dullness as a place of pleasure.

The Germans understand how to stage dramas, operas and musical comedies, but they have no talent to play at being worldly. That might be a virtue were it not that they tried very hard to do both. They open the most approved mundane resorts, they gamble, carouse, dance and mock.

Berlin levies the so-called pleasure tax on 2,500 resorts, and this list includes about 350 cinematograph theatres, 800 drinking places with music and a large number of variety or vaudeville theatres, cabarets and dance halls. Exempt from the tax are cafes without music and theatres with distinctive artistic or educational standards. The pleasure places are not expressing an innate craving for an illusive sentiment.

The German out "for an evening" lacks the "grand manner." A great night dance hall in Berlin may be filled with men in evening dress and women in daring décolleté and only champagne will flow and the music be lively and mysterious, but the atmosphere will be without *verve* or joy. And so it is with a German cabaret. It is oftener obscene than witty, oftener vulgar than *risqué*.

On the Friedrichstrasse, which still in the night is the mart of the unfortunate woman, there parades as wretched a procession of human misanthropes as the world can show. In the long reach of its dimly lighted walks there is no shred of deception or illusion. Hundreds of women march through the darkness obliquely peering at the passerby, signalling, questioning, pressing always on and on, night after night. A few of the women appear to be 30 years old; by far the greater number are much younger, and many are yet in their teens. Every city has its vice and its Friedrichstrasse. But in Berlin one of the most important business streets is frankly committed to this sordidness.

Advertised as a Gay City.

In Reality Is Only Garish

Berlin has been advertised the last two years as an excessively gay city. Some of this notoriety has come from travellers who do not distinguish between gayety and garishness and some from the provinces. The Bavarian or East Prussian with business to transact at the capital, has gone back to his home town and written to his editor in protest against the Gomorrah licensed by the republican regime. Berlin as a politically radical city is not in good favor with the conservative provinces, and the outcry against its libertinism has been part of the reaction against its revolutions and street riots.

Night life was hardly kept alive during the war in Germany, and what there was survived to give the soldier on leave the relaxation of a change. Public dancing was prohibited and the night resorts were closed, though in their stead were opened innumerable drinking rooms with "bar ladies" and music. But dissipation then was more and more a personal rather than a group indulgence.

After the revolution came the time of contrast. Dancing was once more permitted and the old resorts were reopened. Plays which the censor had suppressed were performed. The life of the "daughter of joy" was filmed with a spice of pathos to flavor the otherwise obnoxious topic. Cabarets outwitted each other with acts of suggestive titles and candid contents. Berlin was, generally speaking, a city "on the loose."

And this letdown seems to have been characteristic of an unusually large number of individuals. The war was lost; and the rigid discipline of the *Kaiserreich* having failed to bring success its standards were denied along with its institutions and systems.

Reaction From the Defeat

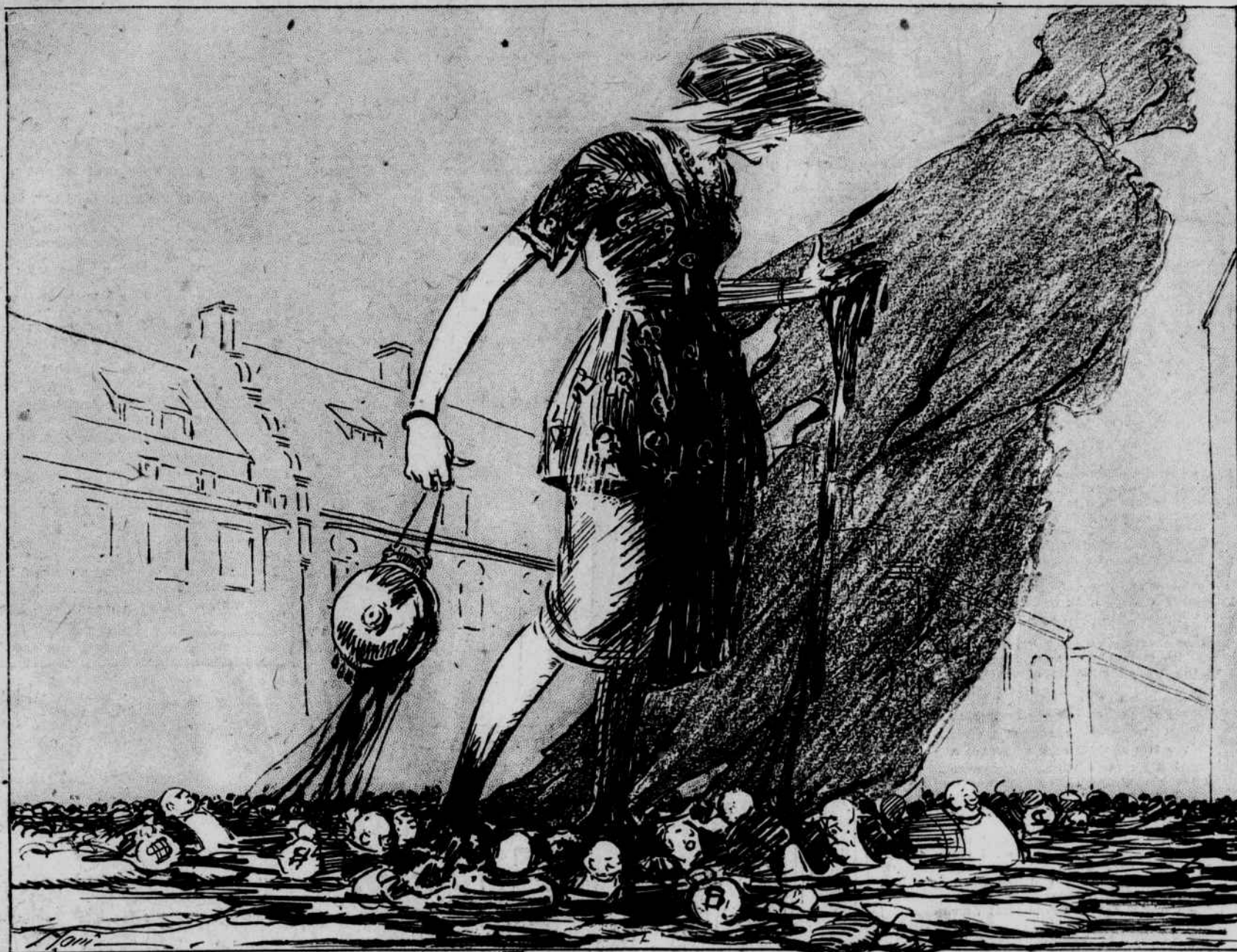
Reflected in the Night Life

Night life may be a test of a nation's health quite as much as its foreign exchange rate or its mortality statistics. A people who experience something so catastrophic as defeat in a world war react to the experience in every phase of their behavior. And so it comes that the fall of exports and the number of girls of the street may bear as factors a parallel relation to the nation's life. And the way Berlin conducted itself in respect of the so-called decadence of life may be of relatively notable importance.

Judged by excesses, Germany has gone through a grilling dissatisfied and spiritually rebellious period. For the lesson of a loose night life is not the wickedness of it out the despair it bespeaks. Cities, like individuals, are not extravagantly immoral for the pleasure it brings, but out of defiance—defiance not against any race or moral rule, but against the truth which has brought them down.

And it needs no Freudian perspicacity to read the season Germany has passed through. It has been a time of revolt, fatigue and misery. That it has cost many thousands of men their self-respect and many young girls their hopes goes without saying.

Low Morale of People Shown by Vulgarly Displayed in Public With Nothing Left to the Imagination and No Excuse Possible for Grossness---Profiteers and Visiting Foreigners Taken In by Garish Wickedness---Reaction From War With Incidental Poverty Lowers Entire City's Standards and 'The Wicked City on the Spree' Develops Into Loathsome Sink



But "gay Berlin" is a trite misnomer. "Defeated Berlin" would be psychologically more descriptive and significant.

But though the excess of Berlin has been a sign of the times, this cannot be said of the candor which is an essence of the normal German nature. The German appraisal of sex is wholly foreign to the Anglo-Saxon or Latin mind, not only for those who speak of sex scientifically but in every popular sense. German Socialist women are making unabashed propaganda for a measure which the outraged clericals call "medicinal Bolshevism."

Even the Marriage Institution Being Modified Radically

The very meaning of marriage has come to be somewhat modified in Germany. In "society" and in the middle classes getting married is regarded much as it would be in England or America, with possibly more emphasis on the property of the contracting parties. But for the rest of Germany the "trial marriage," in which law plays no part, is a general practice.

The ceremonial marriage does not stand for a full acceptance of each other by a husband or wife, but for the establishment of a home. It may follow after a long intimate comradeship in which every prescribed social precept has been obeyed save that of going through the ceremony itself. This is often because several years have to elapse before marriage becomes possible financially, and both husband and wife may have to continue earning and save all they possibly can for the openly espoused enterprise.

Since the Germans see sex in a different perspective from other peoples, and go brusquely to the extreme in normal times, they responded to a national reversal in their characteristic manner by pushing beyond the rigor of commonly accepted codes.

The morals police were not idle during this phase and numerous raids were made, sometimes among people of good social standing, indulging in private orgies. So many obscene films were confiscated that the press not long ago was invited to an exhibit of them and to lend its help in the campaign of suppression. It was after this exhibit that one of the best weekly periodicals in Berlin wrote, deploring the shallow philosophy of German excess, and pleading that more imagination and fancy, and less bluntness, be shown by German pleasure seekers to the end that both they and the public could go their ways without a conflict.

But this period is passing, or has passed, and to-day the German will argue as he used to do, that he should not be reproached for a night life which exists chiefly for foreigners. And in this respect the man of Berlin is no different from the New Yorker or Parisian who disclaims any knowledge of the resorts of his home city. And so far as the dancing palaces and cabarets and barrooms are considered he undoubtedly is right.

Night life in Berlin is chiefly patronized by men from out of town, many of them

from abroad. The greater number of foreigners here are Scandinavians, but the representatives of other lands are to be seen after dark in the same proportion as during the day. But despite this preponderance of outsiders the character of the entertainment is determined by the city itself, just as in Paris the quality is French and in New York it is American.

The taste of this entertainment is extraordinarily insipid, as I can perforce testify, for I recently made explorations of Berlin to see for myself what was going on. I visited the Palais de Danse, dining first at the Mascotte, its pretentiously elegant restaurant, and watching the dancing thereafter in the "palace" itself.

The Mascotte serves the best food in Berlin in a large room lavishly colored with plush and gold and radiant with the dazzling lights of innumerable mirrors reflecting a large fountain of colored water in the centre of the room. A small, vivacious orchestra plays alternately Viennese operetta airs and American jazz. A dinner for two costs not less than 500 marks (to-day only \$6.25), but it would be difficult to spend 2,000 even if the best wines and the rarest dishes on the menu were demanded.

Dancing Floor Always Filled But Holds Only 70 Couples

From the Mascotte the way leads to the high ceilinged dancing hall, which for many years often has been praised as the most attractive in all Europe. But here the only real captivation is the Hungarian band, which dominates the scene with the strong sweep of its rhythms. In scarlet coats and elevated on a gilt balustraded platform, drums and cymbals robustly smashing, it is like a dynamo keeping the thronging couples on the floor awhirl.

The dancing floor is not large, and not more than seventy couples can enjoy it simultaneously, but it is always filled. The women clad in brilliant hues and the men in the black and white of evening clothes make it a feast for the sight. Around the dance floor sit the guests, grouped about small, white covered tables, all obeying the law of the house by drinking champagne. Those who wish only to look on are free to do so; those who care to mingle with the dancers need consult no further formalities than their desires. A woman with an escort is safe from approach; a woman alone is there with the intention of being invited.

This Palais de Danse is what most Americans refer to as one of the "sights" of Berlin, and many a church deacon and responsible leader from some smaller or larger gopher city has had his "fling" by going there for a bottle or for the opportunity of talking across the table with one of the gayly clad women. I know of many American husbands who have visited it in company of their wives and daughters just to give them and himself a chance to see "some life." I always concluded that the fact that the majority of women who were there present solely professionally served somehow to make a visit more attractive to those travellers who were rather glad to be away from home and be free to

stretch a point without their neighbors hearing about it. Certainly no other entertainment (unless it were the delight in the sentimental music) could justify the time spent.

I visited also one of the most advertised cabarets. It may have been merely chance that I hit upon a slow evening; at any rate, it was a week day, and hardly a dozen paying guests appeared during my stay. The cabaret had no stage, only a small polished floor space surrounded by the tables and half closed booths. No admission was charged, the source of revenue being the wines and food.

Ancient Ballet of Three With Little Skill to Display

The cheapest obtainable bottle of wine cost 60 marks, or 75 cents, and this might have been had during daylight for half the sum. A few unattended young women

were about, leisurely smoking and waiting to make the acquaintance of escorts, and ostentatiously applauding each number of the programme. When no escorts wandered in some of these girls donned their hats and went out, apparently to join the marching throng on Friedrichstrasse.

The headliner was advertised as a "ballet" doing "Eva" dances, which a year ago might have meant by women almost or wholly nude. The "ballet" proved to be composed of three women, one at least 40 years old, who knew a little about dancing, assisted by two girls without any proficiency, and all of them suitably garmented. The guests were evidently supposed not to be dismayed by the complete fraud of it all, for one subsequent performer, a monologist, sang a ditty about the "good times" to be had in this particular cabaret, and importuned the audience to join in the chorus and evince in song the conviction that "a rendezvous in the

merry Frou-Frou" was nothing short of the apotheosis of joy.

The chorus was sung half a dozen times, and the monologist went through all the extravagant motions of conducting a large choir of "frou-froulans," although no one was singing excepting the unattended young women.

The closing hours of all cabarets and cafes is 11:30, which only means that then no more drinks may be had, orchestras stop playing and lights are turned down, but guests are permitted to linger over last drops of wine often up to midnight. Upon leaving cafes of this character guests are confronted at the door with as many as a dozen alma seekers in the form of old women selling flowers in beseeching and patronizing tones and crippled soldiers selling matches and imploring help.

To the novice, the closing door of this last cafe would serve to be the knell of all night life revelry, but to the connoisseur it is only the beginning of the "spicy time," and he needs only to go up to a scout, often in the guise of a taxi hustler, or match peddler, to whisper in his ear that he wishes to be guided to a place away from the *polizei* (or police) where some real dancing may be seen.

It was my experience to be taken by such a scout, a one time German pugilist, down rows of back streets to the side entrance of an apartment house. Here surreptitious knocks brought an attendant who stealthily opened the door and led the way through labyrinths of pitch dark corridors to a dimly lighted, green curtained window, where again numbered taps brought a waiter. When given the high sign he opened the door to the cafe, admitting us to the small back room of a respectable daytime *conditorei* (confectionery shop).

Likewise, here there was no admittance charge save for the large tip paid to the "scout," but the cheapest bottle of wine obtainable cost 450 marks, or \$5.62. The narrow space permitted only four small tables, around which sat excitement seekers, some speaking German, others English, but all in whispered tones, which gave the entire atmosphere the air of forbidden sweets.

In the dim light silhouetted against a dark open doorway was a violinist playing slow, seductive music, hardly audible. At intervals a woman dressed in black velvet, décolleté, strutted through the room. Queries from more courageous guests as to when the real dancer was to appear were unanswered, and the suspense increased.

Crowd Wanted a Salome, But Waiters Warned Them

Finally she appeared, the same woman, clad in a scanty net costume, and to sprightly music danced with some dexterity to the evident disappointment of some of the guests, who kept calling for a Salome. Those cries were suddenly interrupted by threatening gestures from the waiters, who in hushed voices ordered all to be quiet, saying: "*Polizei! Polizei!*"

Clinking of glasses stopped and all present were supposed to shudder in anticipation of a raid. None came, and the calls for a nude dancer were resumed. The same woman reappeared, this time in scantier costume, but still within the law, and danced to an exotic tune.

Protests from the guests continued, and their indignation was shown by the small tips placed on the dancer's tray. It was then 2 A. M., and the time for departing had not come, but the loitering night life seekers left simultaneously, murmuring as they went that the whole thing had been a travesty and they hoped never to return.

The dance hall, the cabaret and the secret chamber represented an average entertainment of the three categories of the night life for which the German capital is notorious.

Hauptmann Eager for World Comity

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"PEOPLES must try to know one another without the aid or hindrance of politicians and statesmen," was the opinion of Gerhard Hauptmann, Germany's foremost dramatist and poet, when I visited him at his home in the Silesian mountains recently. He has a horror of interviews and is one of the rare figures in public life who has successfully avoided giving them for years. But his feeling for the need of better understanding between peoples, and notably scientists and artists of different countries, decided him to descend from his splendid isolation.

"Man must speak to man, heart to heart," he continued. He was upset to hear that German scientists had been excluded from the recent international medical congress in Brussels. "The world needs to keep abreast of the German progress in science as much as that of any other nation," was his opinion.

Asks the Neutral Countries to Organize World Conferences

His solution was for neutral countries to take the initiative in organizing conferences of international importance. They could in this way offer a neutral meeting ground and open the way to mutual understanding. Possibly partly because he has pleasant memories of going to Stockholm to receive a Nobel prize Hauptmann thinks Stockholm would be the ideal city to take such initiative. He offered to go there and to put the enthusiasm he has until now been putting into his verse into building up a bridge for better understanding between nations.

Gerhard Hauptmann looking down from the heights of the Silesian mountains found it difficult to understand that Germans should be so disliked abroad. He was unhappy over the Upper Silesian dispute, where he feels that Germany has claims which are of older date and more substantial than those of the Poles. He hoped that common sense



Gerhard Hauptmann, German dramatist and poet, who urges neutral nations to call international scientific conferences.

will gain the day and that the Germans will not only prove to their enemies their good intentions but also win from them a recognition of their sincerity.

A visitor to Gerhard Hauptmann's home cannot but feel that in his mountain fastness he is somehow aloof from the meaner struggles going on below. Soon after leaving the ancient town of Hirschberg, deep in the valley of the Riesengebirge, the traveler sees the Kynast mountain ruin. Over its summit winds a serpentine mountain path toward Agnetendorf, the home of Hauptmann.

Along the road I met the people who live in his books. There were woodsmen, maidens, mountaineers and glass blowers. Peasant cottages with low sloped, shingled roofs and window boxes peeped here and there out of the woods. The way then turned sharply

and around the last corner a tower loomed up out of the dark forest. The high firs and balsams are those which Hauptmann planted about it some twenty years ago.

Hauptmann took me about to the favorite nooks of his garden. He does his dictating each morning at a bench from the middle of the garden. Rain or shine every morning he walks or rides for several hours.

Entering the house my eye was first struck by a large oil painting, some fairy tale in cheerful colors. Opposite was a great open fireplace where artists from everywhere gathered on an evening. There were a few pieces of heavy beech furniture about the room and the ceiling was a star decked blue. Hauptmann for some reason had hung a golden crown up in the middle of the room.

First Editions and Coins Are Hauptmann's Hobby

Books line the walls of nearly all rooms. Hauptmann proudly showed me his treasures: first editions, de luxe bindings and coins. My eye wandered to his work tables. At present he is busy on a short epic poem, "Anna," to appear the middle of October. A great epic "Till Eulenspiegel," dealing partly with present day problems, will appear shortly after. He is just revising the last act of an old comedy he wrote some eight years ago for the Berliner Lustspiel-Theater, dealing with the ups and downs of an artist in Berlin and in a Silesian provincial town.

At the top of the house is the den of the poet. Here he has various instruments, for science is his pastime. On a table in the centre stands a large globe. Another, a glass one, contained two goldfishes of which Hauptmann was very proud. Wooden ship models hang down from the ceiling. He divided his love, he said, between the mountains and the sea and keeps as many reminders of both about him as possible.